

Niigata produces some of the best *sake* in Japan thanks to an overwhelming supply of high-quality rice from the fertile local farmland. Myoko is home to three wonderful breweries: Kiminoin, Chiyo no Hikari and Ayu Masamune.

A big part of the *sake* process in this area is the combination of snow, water and rice, which really brings *nihonshu* (rice wine) together. The brewing process traditionally takes place in the winter months when breweries receive recently harvested rice. The grain is then polished down to a small percentage of the initial size, which helps produce the highest quality *sake*. In the case of Kiminoin *sake* brewery, they use a particular grain of rice that has been polished down to 35 percent. After the polishing process, the rice is soaked and steamed in large pots where it is then carefully mixed with *koji* for the fermenting process. Once the *sake* is made, it is stored in large crates before being bottled to go on sale.

Many breweries offer tours where visitors can experience first-hand how *sake* is produced, and buy bottles of Japan's national drink directly from those who create it.